

Cabin John Bridge
Cabin John
Montgomery County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-180

HABS
MD
16-CABJO
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington 25, D. C.

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Owner: District of Columbia

Date of Erection: 1857-63

Engineer and Designer: Captain Montgomery C. Meigs, U. S. Corps of Engineers

Present Condition and Use: Carries original water conduit across Cabin John Valley and Creek. Soon after Bridge was built it was floored for highway use. Parapets were added in 1873 and an asphalt paving in 1875.

Materials of Construction: Granite and sandstone from a nearby quarry.

Description and History: Cabin John Bridge is one of the longest masonry arches in the world with a span of 220 feet and a rise of $57\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The conduit, lined with cast-iron plates is carried across on spandril arches just under the highway.

Captain Meigs (later Lincoln's Quartermaster General) was in charge of building the conduit for the District water system. A temporary canal spur and lock was built to permit delivery of granite and sandstone by way of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. A nearby quarry supplied the abutment stone. Failures of one kind or another delayed completion and consequently the aquaduct was not ready for service until 1863. In the meantime a controversy had arisen over proper credit to be given to the officials in charge of the project. Cabin John bridge was built while Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War and his name was engraved on a marker along with that of Franklin Pierce. During the Civil War, Secretary Stanton ordered Davis' name chiseled off. In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt ordered it restored. A local newspaper of 1909 relates how L. B. Horne of Wilkinson County, Mississippi was accorded the privilege of restoring Davis' name at no cost to the government. Mr. Horne hailed from the same county as Jefferson Davis.

Origin of the place name is of interest. Colonial records refer to Cabin John Creek as Captain John's Branch, supposedly for a mysterious hermit who lived at the spot. Some tales say he was an Indian, others have him a pirate who buried great riches in the vicinity.

References: W. P. A. American Guide Series, Washington City and Capital, Washington, 1937, pp. 809-10.

Prepared by: Russell Jones and Worth Bailey, HABS, National Park Service, 1959.

Approved:

Dick Lutton
Chief Architect

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